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THE JEWISH WELFARE BOARD

BY
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Executive Director¹⁾
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JEWISH WELFARE BOARD

Primarily the purpose of the Jewish Welfare Board is to help America win the war. Despite the basic American principle of a separate Church and State, or, to be more exact, because of it, the American Government in the first days of the war perceived the necessity of calling upon certain religious welfare agencies to co-operate with it. It sought this co-operation because it recognized the value of morale in warfare, and knew how close was the relationship between morale and modern community ways of life. With a breadth of view and a degree of foresight, perhaps never before equalled by a war administration of any other country, the United States Government set itself to thinking out the war problems not only in terms of ships, guns, munitions, and supplies, but also in health, decency, personal improvement of the men, contentment, *esprit*. In short, all those elements that go to make up the concept of morale in its broadest implications received the closest study and the most thorough-going application.

A special Commission on Training Camp Activities was created, as a branch of the War Department, charged with the specific duties of making life in the new American camps and in the communities adjoining the camps as normal as conditions of actual war and the problems of an unprecedented national emergency would permit. This commission sought to utilize the potential social resources of the country, and it early brought to bear on the problem the whole strength of the

Young Men's Christian Association, with its nation-wide organization, so thoroughly alive to the needs of young men, and so excellently adapted to the nation's new work.

In the same spirit and for the same purposes the War Department through this special Training Camp Commission—the Fosdick Commission, as it has come to be known—invited the large Catholic group in America to participate in the national welfare program, with the result that the Knights of Columbus was nominated by the Catholic Church and accepted by the American Government as the authoritative Catholic agency for war purposes.

The selection of the third agency to represent what might be considered the third largest religious group in America, namely, the Jewish group, was fraught with difficulties. It is a commentary upon Jewish life in America, and particularly upon its work of national organization and management, that with 260 years of history behind it, and with literally thousands of organizations, no single agency could be selected as representative of the Jewry of America. True, one or two of them seemed to have some special claim to such recognition, but by reason of their limited constitution or platform, or for some other reason, they failed to secure the endorsement of the Jews as a whole. The result was a meeting of representatives of some ten or more national Jewish organizations, at which it was decided that each organization present should delegate certain powers to a new agency. This was the beginning of the organization which has since become known as the Jewish Welfare Board, and which has obtained the official recognition of the Government and, indeed, its mandate to contribute on behalf of the Jews of America to the national work of welfare among the nation's uniformed men.



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As the officially recognized agency of the War Department and of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, the Jewish Welfare Board has been called to undertake high tasks and responsibilities. It has been charged with the nomination and selection of the Jewish welfare workers in the camps and cantonments of this country and in the hospitals and rest camps abroad. In these increasingly critical times, no task could be more exacting. The initial selection of men, however, is but part of it. It is necessary that they be carefully apprised of their duties as quasi-public officials, that they know thoroughly their relation to the Government, to its military establishment, to the Commission on Training Camp Activities, and to the welfare agencies with which we have joined hands, namely, the Y. M. C. A. and the K. of C. They must know the meaning of democracy in the American camp. They should understand what Americanization denotes and what it does not. They must be inspired with the ideal of an army and navy, selected from all races and creeds, to fight for the liberties of all peoples and for the rights of all religions, under our flag and under the flags of the Allies. And our welfare workers must be trained to interpret these things to the soldiers and sailors, to bring group closer to group and all men into clearer understanding of America's ideals and aims in this war. The welfare agencies are not invited to do separatist work; they are asked to join hands in fostering and promoting a joint welfare program.

As its contribution to this program, the Jewish Welfare Board has placed one hundred and ninety-eight workers in the American camps, and has sent, in addition, countless others—volunteers who, as occasional or regular visitors in the camps, have preached the message of religion, have assisted

in other ways at religious services, visited the sick in the hospitals, the men in difficulty in the guard-houses, or entertained men in groups and cheered and comforted them individually. As its contribution to the physical resources of the camps, the Welfare Board is erecting thirty buildings, not to overlap, not to duplicate, but to supplement the facilities created by other agencies, where such facilities were needed, either for the housing of our workers and the administration of their work, or for the general welfare needs of Jews and non-Jews alike. At Camp Upton, near New York, the Jewish Welfare Building, recently completed, is used for services by soldiers of every faith. On the other hand, the Welfare Board makes use of a general church headquarters, erected by the General War-Time Commission on the Churches, to the upkeep of which it contributes a substantial amount of money.

Again, we have assisted the American Library Association in its nation-wide campaign for books. We have encouraged the giving of comforts and gifts to the soldiers and sailors, regardless of creed, for to draw distinctions between creeds would be to violate the very ethics of the democracy we cherish. As official representatives of the Government, we are called to minister to *all men*.

This by no means implies that religious work has no place in the American welfare program, or that the welfare agencies must reduce their efforts to that colorless, meaningless something which frequently goes by the name of non-sectarianism. On the contrary, the Jewish Welfare Board would not truly represent the American Government, unless it also represented the organized Jewry which created it. Indeed, specialized ministrations of each group to its own men in the camps are implied in the very organization which the War Department

created with the help of the Commission on Training Camp Activities and the welfare agencies.

Thanks to this large view on the part of the Government, we have in the Welfare Board, for the first time in the history of America, an organization which not only has the official endorsement of the Government, but likewise that of organized American Jewry. The Board to-day counts among its societies no less than fourteen prominent Jewish associations, among which are the Agudath ha-Rabbonim, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Council of Jewish Women, Council of Young Men's Hebrew and Kindred Associations, Independent Order Bnai Brith, Independent Order Brith Abraham, Independent Order Brith Sholom, Jewish Chautauqua Society, Jewish Publication Society of America, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, New York Board of Jewish Ministers, Order Brith Abraham, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, and the United Synagogue of America.

The relationship between the Board and its parent bodies is for the most part steady and constructive. The rabbinical bodies have co-operated in the arrangement of an abridged prayer book for the use of soldiers and sailors of our faith. The Jewish Publication Society of America acts as the publishing agency of the board, which has thus far placed orders with it for the publication of no less than one hundred and eighty thousand copies of the *Abridged Prayer Book* and one hundred and sixty thousand copies of the *Readings from the Holy Scripture*, arranged with the help of the Society's editor.

With the Agudath ha-Rabbonim (the Federation of Orthodox Rabbis) the Welfare Board has been active in an inquiry as to the demand for kosher food on the part of the Jewish

men in the camps, governmental sanction having been secured for the sale of kosher non-perishable food products in the camps and cantonments wherever such supply is warranted by the demand therefor.

A series of circuits for the conduct of lecture courses to soldiers and sailors throughout the spring and summer months is being arranged under the joint auspices of the Welfare Board and the Jewish Chautauqua Society.

To the town or community program of the Welfare Board substantial contributions have been made by the Independent Order Bnai Brith, which has organized some eight or nine community centers now operating as I. O. B. B. branches of the Welfare Board. While these branches of themselves constitute a material donation to our total assets, the I. O. B. B. and the Independent Order Brith Abraham, as well as other national Jewish fraternities, are rendering large services of another kind through the campaigns for funds which they have furthered throughout their lodges and the moral backing and encouragement which they have from the beginning lent in unstinted measure.

The Council of Young Men's Hebrew and Kindred Associations has acted as our special advisory body wherever we have needed the viewpoint of the specialist in the inauguration of soldier activities in conjunction with Y. M. C. A. work.

The American Jewish Relief Committee, though in no way a constituent or affiliated organization, has rendered our work an immeasurable service by relieving us almost entirely from the labor and responsibility of fund-raising. Of the million or more dollars that have been contributed to welfare work to date, a very large part was secured in the special campaign of

the American Jewish Relief Committee in New York City in December last, which brought together a fund of about five million dollars for the war sufferers and the Welfare Board conjointly, and a large part of the balance of our total income to date has likewise been secured under the friendly auspices of this committee.

To the American Jewish Committee, under the leadership of Mr. Louis Marshall, we look for the adjudication of cases involving religious or other rights of Jewish men, and, in turn, we are helping the Bureau of Jewish Statistics and Research of the American Jewish Committee in its special work of securing a list of the names of all Jews participating in the present war in the American military and naval forces, by sending to that Bureau all the statistical data which it becomes possible for our agents to secure.

We are also extending assistance and hospitality to the Jewish Legionaries enlisting in America for service in Palestine under the British flag, for which purposes we have made contributions through the Zionist organizations.

Further mention might be made of several other groups of organized Jewry, both national and local, that are aiding the welfare work in its library collections and in other ways, and still the list of our co-operating agencies would not be exhausted; but for the present purposes of illustrating our attachment and responsibility to the organized Jewry of America, it is probably not necessary to multiply examples.

From the foregoing it will be seen that it is probably but fair to say the Jewish Welfare Board truly represents both the American Government and American Jewry—at least so far as the organizations of the latter are concerned. Unprecedented

as this is in the entire history of Jewish life in America, the Welfare Board lays no claim to any special distinction for this achievement. It is the crisis which confronts America, the crisis of the World War, that has brought about this result, and if it may be accounted an advantage from the point of view of Jewish group life, it is an advantage for which we as Jews can assume no merit or distinction. We shall, on the other hand, merit rebuke and censure if, to the accomplishment created by these unlooked-for world conditions, we shall make no contribution of our own. We can neither truly speak for our Government nor for the organized Jewry of America, unless we also represent the unorganized Jewish people of America, and by this unorganized Jewish people we must understand the eighty thousand or more American soldiers and sailors of Jewish faith and the hundreds of thousands more whose interests are bound up with theirs.

Difficult as it is to be true to the thoughts and sentiments of the Jewish people, the Welfare Board ardently desires so to be. With this general attitude toward its work, it assumes to preach no special *-ism* (except Judaism), and it permits none to be preached. In its religious work in the camps it attempts to meet the needs of the men as these needs are there ascertained. For Jews desiring an orthodox service it promotes orthodox services. For sons of Reform Jews it supplies reform services with the Union Prayer Book. For the preponderating group of soldiers of orthodox Jewish families, whose requirements are best met by what is called Conservative Judaism, appropriate services are conducted accordingly. Without standardizing any doctrine of its own, the Welfare Board endorses all degrees of doctrine, if soldiers of Jewish faith uphold them.

Without seeking to impose any ready-made program of its own, it gives encouragement to whatever the self-expression of the Jewish men demands.

With the American Library Association the Board is co-operating in supplying Yiddish books and other reading matter to Yiddish-speaking men. It has prepared to date, for distribution in the camps, three pamphlets in Yiddish, one on Government benefits and two on problems of social hygiene, and it has at the present time in contemplation several additional pamphlets in this language. For those who desire to conduct Jewish discussion circles it has now in preparation several subject outlines for guidance and instruction in the conduct of such circles. With a donation from the Jewish Publication Society of a library of Jewish books in each of the camps and cantonments, foundations have been laid for a Jewish library, to which the Board is making additions from week to week.

In addition to these group activities along religious or educational lines, the welfare workers specialize in what has been called personal welfare work, and it may be said without exaggeration that no personal welfare work that is being carried on in the American camps is more intensive or constructive than that of the representatives of the Jewish Welfare Board. The personal problems that come before the welfare workers have a vast variety of phases, including certain military and non-military problems of the men themselves, as well as questions involving the men and their families. Our workers are regular visitors at the hospitals and guard-houses; they assist and advise men in matters of transfer, leave, and real or fancied discrimination; they advise them as to money and business matters, many of our representatives giving legal advice.

Others who are rabbis perform individual religious ministrations of various kinds, particularly at the embarkation camps. In cases involving the families of men, it is our policy to refer largely to the American Red Cross, to whom the Government has delegated these functions. A basis of co-operation has been established with the Red Cross, but of necessity it is still tentative. The family difficulties of men in the service constitute a developing problem. It is a dynamic rather than a static situation that we are here dealing with, and the basis of co-operation between the welfare agencies and the Red Cross must of necessity be progressive rather than fixed, depending upon developing problems and experience, as well as upon changes in formulation of policy in the Red Cross itself and as between the Red Cross and the War Department. The problem of the welfare worker is not confined to the camp, however. He follows the soldiers wherever they go. In the near-by communities, the welfare worker makes the community welfare program, co-ordinating the hospitality activities, collecting and dispatching the comforts and gifts, managing the entertainments at the community center, and assisting soldiers and sailors in utilizing the religious or other facilities of the town or city.

For the men overseas, a special group has been assigned. It comprises a commission of three workers, and an additional worker who will remain in Paris to direct the overseas work, while the others will return with a report based upon their survey of existing conditions. A supplementary group will comprise some six or eight workers, trained in our American service, whose function it will be to initiate similar activities in the important posts in France, and to this group additions will be made from month to month, until an adequate force

shall have been sent abroad. In addition to the welfare workers, the Government contemplates sending army chaplains of the various faiths, to the extent of one for each twelve hundred men. The Jewish chaplains are selected by the Government after endorsement by the Committee on Chaplains of the Welfare Board, which since the beginning of the war has acted as the Government's advisory agency, with reference to all Jewish chaplains.

Though ostensibly limited in its work to the men of the United States Army and Navy, the Welfare Board conceives its task broadly. Under the latest military rulings, American soldiers abroad are members of the army of the Allies, and with this breaking down of national distinctions, the scope of our work is correspondingly enlarged. Thus the Welfare Board has purchased ten thousand copies of the books for soldiers published by Dr. J. H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, for distribution among the English-speaking Jewish soldiers of the Allies, five thousand copies of Psalms and five thousand copies of a pamphlet entitled *Jewish Thoughts*. These are being distributed through Dr. Lévy, Chief Rabbi of Paris, and Lieutenant Voorsanger, chaplain with the American Expeditionary Forces.

We have likewise made a subvention to the Jewish Community of Washington for welfare work among civilian workers, including women as well as men, and we are making a study of conditions among Jewish girls in New York as a result of revelations recently made with respect to places largely frequented by soldiers and sailors.

Whether in all this work we represent the sentiments and viewpoints of the Jewish people, or whether we fail to represent it, would be difficult to say. Indeed, our Jewry of America is of

such a composite nature, and the forces that play upon it are so varied and deep-rooted in their origin, that it is hard even to ascertain what these sentiments and viewpoints are. So far as the articulate groups are concerned, we know that we have been criticized now for being too Jewish, and again for not being Jewish enough; for advocating what has been called "segregation", and again for being exponents of what has been called the melting-pot theory; on the one hand, for making martyrs of the Jewish men with the colors, because we have failed to furnish them with kosher food, and, on the other, for making martyrs of them in our sympathy with those who desire such dietary restrictions. Fault is found with us for permitting Yiddish books to be circulated in the camps, and again we are blamed for not providing enough of this literature.

Of one other important department of the welfare work scant mention has as yet been made—the work of our local Jewries. We hold that our purpose is unfulfilled, that we cannot truly represent either the Government or nationally organized Jewry, unless and until we also represent the *locally* organized Jewry, that is, the local Jewish communities. It is from these local communities that the Jewish soldiers have come. It is to these communities that they will return. Indeed, in ten or a score of years from now, the eighty or hundred thousand, or possibly one hundred and fifty thousand Jews of our National Army and Navy will be the prominent Jewish citizens, the upholders of our Jewish communities, the leaders and workers of our local Jewries. If we would have them remain steadfast to these communities throughout all the tragic days through which they must presently pass, they must be made to feel the spiritual forces of the communities behind them. They must know that these forces are with them wher-



ever they may go. Apart from this, the *national* Jewish Welfare Board is in the truest sense the child of the *local* communities, as well as of the *national* Jewish organizations. It is to the local communities that we turn for both moral and financial support. We look to them, moreover, for definite service. We expect each community to send its Jewish boys into the service with a formal expression of its belief in them, so that each man may feel the power and strength of his community behind him. We expect each community to follow its soldiers with gifts, by correspondence and other aid, as well as by visitation to their families. We expect each community, meanwhile, to prepare for the return of these young men, for their readjustment to civil life, for the rehabilitation of their families, and for the new adjustments in the work of the social agencies of each town.

It was with all these ideals in mind that the Welfare Board, unlike the Knights of Columbus and the Y. M. C. A., incorporated into its platform a program of town as well as of camp work. For the past six months it has worked incessantly in the organization of what it calls local branches. At the present day one hundred and fifty six Jewish communities have organized themselves as J. W. B. branches. More are in process of organization. Before the end of this year the Welfare Board plans to have organized no less than two hundred local Jewries as Welfare Board subsidiaries. The results of this policy have already proven the wisdom thereof. It has stimulated wide-spread interest in soldier and sailor work. This is particularly true of those centers of Jewish life which are somewhat remote from large encampments. In the camp cities or camp towns the presence of uniformed men has of itself stimulated this interest, and it may be truly said that the real welfare workers

are the Jews and Jewesses of these camp cities. In the very first days and months of the war, they were contributing their time and energies and giving of their means to the entertainment of men on leave, to visiting the sick, and to affording comfort to the lonely and dejected. But in the towns more remote from the camps this stimulation of interest has been provided by the organization of the J. W. B. branches.

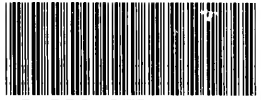
The fiscal policy of the Welfare Board was determined several months ago when its Executive Committee voted in favor of a central collection and disbursement of funds under which all moneys raised for and in behalf of the Welfare Board became payable to the national treasurer, the national body making itself responsible in turn for promoting and financing welfare work in the towns and cities as well as in the American and overseas camps. It was felt that, though this fund was procured from the local Jewries of the country, authority to spend it should proceed from the central office, which, by reason of its national and international perspective, could best decide as to the wisdom of expenditures, and thus guarantee to the local Jewries the best possible administration of the funds that they themselves had created. Any other policy would have been fatal, and would have made each community the collector and dispenser of its own welfare fund, thus leading to excessive outlays for town hospitality, much of which is not only of no positive social value, but of a decided negative social value, while leaving without adequate resources the more immediately important work in the camps. Indeed to have adopted a less centralized system would have made impossible a truly responsible administration of the fund, such as the War Department justly expects of the agency which it has nominated as the authoritative functioning body for its Jewish

group of soldiers. The National Jewish Welfare Board desires to be in the truest sense the representative of local Jewries. It is the local communities organized, combined, and raised to national self-consciousness. In this view of the case, the national office is but the visible expression of a covenant or pact between all the local communities of America, each of which desires to serve the most by serving all the rest.

The national office furnishes to each community under this pact the advantages of a broad perspective. It provides a means of contact with the Federal Government to which it is accredited by the Jews of America. It has to-day an organization of nearly 200 workers associated for the purpose of carrying on the welfare work of the correlated communities of the country. It provides to these communities a school in which each month a new group of some twenty-five or more men from various sections are trained as community servants—men who now give themselves to Jewish war work and will not fail the community when later called upon to help solve the even more trying problems of the post-war period. It places at the disposition of all local communities a Research Department for the study of the war aspects of community problems as they change and develop under the impact of the world struggle.

Has not then an organization like this, created in an emergency—representing the American Government, organized Jewry, the plain Jewish people, and the local communities of America—a unique opportunity? And shall not American Jews avail themselves of it by rising now as never before to a true consciousness of the character, the scope, and the meaning of their entire community?

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